

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -
Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad

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Iraqi 4-H Clubs Make News In Washington – USDA Ag Advisor, Mary Kerstetter's efforts to expand 4-H clubs to Iraq, were highlighted in a recent edition of the Washington Post's Kids Post section. To date, Mary has secured funding to start four 4-H Clubs in Iraq. In contrast to its farm related beginnings, 4-H clubs today cover a broad range of activities for all kinds of kids, teaching photography, arts and crafts, and gardening. The four 4-H clubs in Iraq consist of 124 kids (boys and girls), ranging from ages 12-16. See: <http://www.washpost.com/kidspost/kidspost.pdf>.



Iraqi Buyers' Mission to SIAL – USDA Marketing Specialist, Walid Sharif accompanied 25 Iraqi businessmen representing 20 Iraqi companies interested in grains, pulses, lentils, dairy, meat and poultry to Paris to visit the international food exposition, SIAL, one of Europe's largest. This year's U.S. Pavilion included over 120 exhibitors and representatives of the U. S. Dry Beans Council, U.S. Meat Export Federation and U. S. Poultry and Egg Export Council.



U.S. / Iraqi Date Palm Partnership – Basra PRT Agricultural BBA Kamel El Hassani accompanied three Iraqi date palm company representatives California to meet with representatives of the California date palm industry. The past two decades have seen a dramatic decline in the traditional date palm industry in Southern Iraq due to changing climate, increased soil salinity, and political and social instability. Local date palm industry leaders are eager to learn about the newest methods in growing, harvesting and marketing date palms to regain competitiveness.



Conservation Tillage Training - Ag Advisors at PRT Baghdad and Patrick Broyles, USDA's Soil Scientist met with 25 Iraqi farmers from Mada'in Qadha (southern Baghdad province) to deliver training on conservation tillage practices. Patrick shared his 30 years of soil expertise with farmers to help them increase their crop production. He suggested farmers begin using reduced tillage techniques to preserve crop residues and organic matter in the soil. Most Iraqi farmers use traditional methods of field preparation that have left the soil severely depleted of the organic matter that is the key to increasing crop yields.

Personnel Update - There are currently 32 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and at Embassy Baghdad. Since the last *MM*, Extension Advisor David Drew tendered his resignation but will provide some long-distance advising from back in Florida.

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